

Message Text

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SUBJECT: MALAYSIAN REACTION TO AUG 18 PANMONJUN INCIDENT

REF: STATE 211862

1. SUMMARY. MALAYSIAN PRESS GAVE FULL BUT NOT SPECIAL COVERAGE TO KILLING OF TWO U.S. ARMY OFFICERS AT PANMONJUN AND SUBSEQUENT REACTIONS FROM WASHINGTON AND PYONGYANG. EDITORIAL COMMENT WAS VARIED WITH GOVERNMENT-INFLUENCED "NEW STRAITS TIMES" (NST) TAKING LINE THERE NO DANGER OF ESCALATION BECAUSE NEITHER NORTH NOR SOUTH KOREANS COULD BEGIN A WAR WITHOUT SUPPORT FROM SUPER POWER PATRONS. END SUMMARY.

2. MALAYSIAN PRESS GAVE FULL, BUT NOT SPECIAL, COVERAGE TO MURDER AUGUST 18 OF TWO U.S. ARMY OFFICERS BY NORTH KOREAN GUARDS AT PANMUNJOM. COMPETING STORIES AUG 19 SUCH AS PHILIPPINE
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QUAKE, PRAPHAS TRIP TO BANGKOK, AND MALAYSIAN DIFFICULTIES

AT COLOMBO NAM SUMMIT, KEPT STORY ON MIDDLE OF BACK PAGE OF GOVERNMENT-INFLUENCED "NEW STRAITS TIMES" (FINANCE MINISTER RAZALEIGH HAMZAH IS CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD OF FLEET HOLDINGS WHICH OWNS THE NST WHILE HIS RIGHT-HAND-MAN JUNUS SUDDIN IS MANAGING DIRECTOR OF NST) AND OTHER PAPERS GAVE SIMILAR PLACEMENT. ON 20TH, HOWEVER, NST CARRIED FIVE-COLUMN HEADLINE: "TENSION MOUNTS AFTER KILLINGS OVER BORDER TREE, NORTH KOREA ON FULL ALERT" AND ON 21ST "U.S. RUSHES BOMBERS TO KOREA." OTHER PAPERS, INCLUDING CHINESE AND MALAY LANGUAGE, ALSO GAVE STORY FRONT PAGE TREATMENT THOSE DAYS. BY AUGUST 23, STORY WAS STILL ON FRONT AND BACK PAGES, BUT MOST PAPERS AND NST REDUCED SIZE AND IMPORTANCE OF PLACEMENT. STORY GRADUALLY FADED AS IT BECAME CLEAR FURTHER VIOLENCE NOT LIKELY.

3. EDITORIAL COMMENT WAS VARIED, WITH NST REASONING ON AUG 21 THAT SITUATION INVOLVED MAINLY "VERBAL COMBAT," AS EDITORIAL WAS TITLED. "THE ONLY LARGE SCALE VIOLENCE THAT IS NOW LIKELY TO BREAK OUT...WILL BE VERBAL...." THE NST EDITORIALIST WROTE, CONCLUDING THAT BECAUSE "ANY WAR IN KOREA MUST DRAW IN ALL THE BIG POWERS. EVEN IF IT IS ASSUMED THAT PYONGYANG AND SEOUL WANT TO MOVE, THEY CANNOT DO SO WITHOUT THE PRIOR SUPPORT OF EITHER CHINA OR THE SOVIET UNION, SEOUL WITHOUT ...THE U.S. PEKING, MOSCOW AND WASHINGTON ARE NOT LIKELY TO SACRIFICE DETENTE BY PANDERING TO THOSE WHO WOULD MAKE A FOREST OUT OF A TREE." ON AUGUST 23, TWO PAPERS COMMENTED EDITORIALY. MALAY LANGUAGE BINTANG TIMOR WROTE THAT: "ALTHOUGH THE U.S. HAS SENT ITS AIRCRAFT CARRIER TO SOUTH KOREA, THIS DOES NOT MEAN THE U.S. WANTS TO TURN KOREA INTO A NEW BATTLE GROUND. KILLING OF TWO AMERICAN OFFICERS BY NORTH KOREANS WAS A MINOR INCIDENT WITH SIGNIFICANT POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS. IT SEEMS THAT NORTH KOREA DELIBERATELY CREATED THE INCIDENT TO GET THE BACKING OF THIRD WORLD NATIONS FOR A PROPOSED RESOLUTION IN THE UN NEXT MONTH WHICH DEMANDS WITHDRAWAL OF U.S TROOPS FROM KOREA." SIN PIN JIH PAO, WHICH TENDS TO REFLECT PRC POLICY LINES, OF THE SAME DAY TORTUOUSLY MASSAGED THE FACTS OF THE INCIDENT APPEARED TO BE INTENDED TO OBTAIN AN EXPLANATION AND COMPENSATION FROM PYONGYANG, ACTUALLY U.S. COUNTERMOVES WERE AIMED AT CONVINCING THE NAM SUMMIT CONFERENCE THAT TENSION LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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IN KOREA WAS THE FAULT OF THE NORTH. SIN PIN CONCLUDED THAT, DESPITE U.S. EFFORTS, IT IS CLEAR SOUTH KOREA IS NOT PART OF THE U.S., THEREFORE U.S. TROOPS SHOULD NOT BE STATIONED THERE INDEFINITELY AND THE NORTH-SOUTH DISPUTE SHOULD BE LEFT TO KOREAN PEOPLE THEMSELVES TO SETTLE.

4. COMMENT. LOCAL PRESSPLAY, PARTICULARLY NST, TENDED TO CONCENTRATE ON LARGER ISSUES AND TO DOWN-PLAY DETAILS OF

STORY WHICH SHOWED NORTH KOREANS CLEARLY TO BLAME. THIS IS IN
LINE WITH GOM DESIRE TO MAINTAIN PUBLIC EQUIDISTANCE ON
ISSUES INVOLVING THE GREAT POWERS AND ALSO REFLECTS LACK OF
PUBLIC INTEREST BECAUSE OF DISTANCE FROM NORTH ASIA.
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